Through the Forbidden Gates

The Black Cat

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October 1900

Through the Forbidden Gates.
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A Human Chameleon.
Newton Newkirk.

Mr. Corndropper's Hired Man.
W. M. Stannard.

A Sister to the Borgias.
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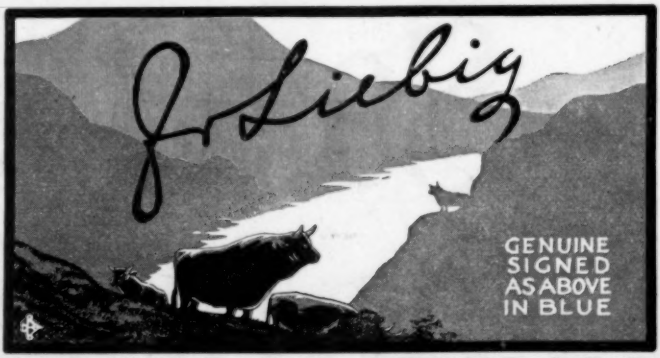

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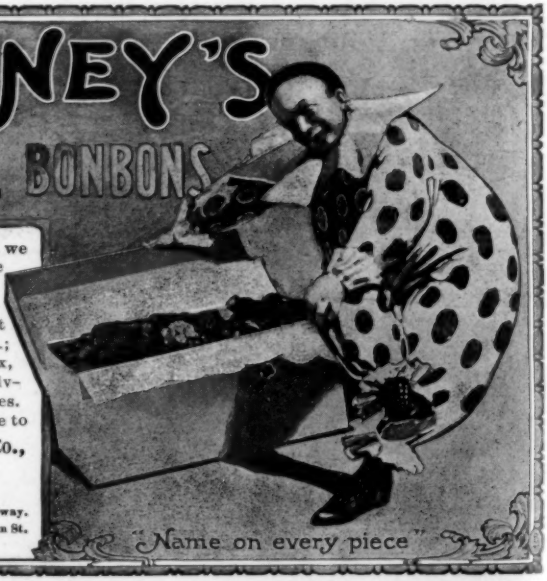

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Through the Forbidden Gates.*

BY CARROLL CARRINGTON.

IN the village to which I have been forced to retire I am never a very popular member of the circle which sits around the stove of winter evenings in the rear room of the cigar store and spins yarns into the haze of bad tobacco smoke; for, to tell you the truth, I never could see that there was much in a story which did not contain at least a couple of killings, one international complication, and a hero whom all the world might know — a fine public celebrity to whom it would be worth while knowing that something had befallen.

The little love adventures of Mary and John, the incidents which had dogged the heels of Bill since he ran away from Pumpkinville with his wardrobe at the end of a stick, the nocturnal escapades of the one lone prisoner in the hamlet jail — these things I could never see anything in, though my companions, I'll admit, never fail to discern their importance, nor to grow reminiscent over them far into the night, in a degree that is wonderfully ingenious, and likewise fatiguing.

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $200 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending March 31, 1900.

Give me, I have always declared, the world for a stage and the nations for scenes; throw in a couple of oceans between the acts; involve an international conspiracy in the plot and a few royal names in the cast, disclose a mystery that will make the world shake in its shoes, instead of merely causing old Jerry Dillon to drag his boots off the stove-fender and say "Gosh!" Put in some good sword-fighting, with a king to defend or a princess to win — and there we shall have a story. That is the kind of a story I am going to tell you now — that is my idea of a real story — and I have never heard more than half a dozen that were worth the telling.

Of course, I am speaking of true stories — stories which seldom seem wonderful at all unless you know the people concerned.

It was while I was second lieutenant on the U. S. S. *Wisconsin* — I have since been retired at my urgent request, that I might hide away with my beautiful wife in this obscure village (which I have given a false name) — that I got my feet entangled in the curtain ropes, while nosing behind the scenes, of a drama that was altogether too big to be any business of mine, and came precious near being flung through the curtain as it fell, and thus exposing what was never meant to be seen at all by the world in front. The curtain came down, and the ropes were unwound from my feet, and here I am safe enough. But it is a condition of my telling you this story that you never repeat it in the hearing of a Chinaman. I am well enough hid, I believe, but you do not know the Chinese nation as I do; and while I cheerfully give you the facts as they befell, it may as well be remembered that there was never yet any good came of being wilfully reckless.

I was sitting in my cabin on the *Wisconsin* one evening as the vessel lay at anchor in Honolulu harbor, when my orderly came to the door with a card. I glanced at the card; then, in some surprise, at the orderly.

"A Chinaman?" I asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Did he mention any business?"

"Says he carries a letter of introduction from a mutual friend."

"A mutual friend — of myself and a Chinaman?" I tapped the card on the table. Clearly this was not San Francisco.

"But show him aboard," I said, finishing the reflection aloud. "In Honolulu it may be different."

In the Chinatown of the former city, where I had been a frequent visitor, I had observed that people either threw stones at the little yellow devils or turned them into servants and cursed them to their faces — but here in Honolulu was Lieutenant Manning, U. S. N., receiving an exquisitely engraved card and a message from one of them to the effect that a "mutual friend — "

He came in so softly that I should not have known that he was there if the orderly had not clattered for both of them. He was elaborately silked, combed and braided, and he carried about him all over an air of dignified repose which it may surprise you to hear brought my feet off a chair instantly and caused me to rise with a bow of civil greeting.

"Lieutenant Manning," he said, in perfect English, "I have the pleasure of presenting you with a note from one who says she is your friend."

"She!" I cried, taking the envelope from his outstretched hand. "Is the note from a lady?"

"A lady?" he repeated. "Why, yes; a very charming one." Then he gracefully seated himself in a chair at the opposite side of the table, signed that the orderly might close the cabin door, and waited for me to read.

I still have that letter, and here it is:

> MY DEAR LIEUTENANT: — I am sure you will be surprised to receive a letter from one signing herself a friend who has known you scarcely two days; but we were certainly such good friends during that little while that I feel assured you will not deny me a favor so soon, if I ask it.
>
> I am introducing Mr. Chin Fuey to you for a very great purpose. He will ask you to do things which may seem strange to you, and they will be dangerous, too; but I want you to do them. I think you are just the one who can — it may be the only one — as you have the discretion and courage and strength that will be necessary. I have studied you, you see. You may trust Mr. Fuey. He has a tremendous secret on his hands — a secret that would shake the world if it got out now, and perhaps cause a terrible war. Through you it may be saved entirely, and only the immediate principals be any the wiser. I am trembling as I write, for I am in the awful secret myself, through no fault of my own. You must get me out of it — I implore you to do as Mr. Fuey asks you. When you return, if you ever do — which God grant! else we shall all be destroyed — when you return to Honolulu, come and ask what you will from
>
> THE WOMAN IN YELLOW.

I felt the Chinaman's eyes on my face as I finished reading — felt them keenly — but when I looked up at him he was absently regarding a bracelet on his right wrist. I folded the letter, put it calmly enough into the envelope (it has always been a mystery to me how I do these things), and tucked it into my pocket as though it had been an invitation to an afternoon tea.

As a matter of fact, aside from the whirl that my head was in over the weirdness of the communication, I did not know who the writer of it was. I recalled the "Woman in Yellow" quickly enough — I had danced with her all last night and dreamed of her all of the present day — but even then I was ignorant of her name. She had never unmasked. I must have met her before the ball, if she had known me two days, as she claimed — but where? I was trying to think without appearing at all concerned, when the voice of my visitor arrested me.

"I accept you," he said — and I fancied there was relief and a good deal of hope in his tone — "I will trust you, and will stake our lives on the hazard."

"The devil you will!" I exclaimed; "but who said I would accept you?"

"I was watching you as you read that letter. It was the test I told the writer I would abide by. If you did not start and betray the emotions which it certainly roused in you, you were the man I wanted for coolness and self-possession. If, on the other hand, you had displayed excitement, or even unusual interest in your face, I should very soon have bidden you good evening."

"And so you may yet," I retorted, "unless you get speedily to the point of your visit."

"That is not so quickly done," said he, "nor can I afford the time, if you can, for explaining matters, until I am first assured that you will accept the commission I would impose on you."

"Let it be nothing unbecoming to a gentleman and an officer," I said with a frown, "and the bargain is more than half struck. But, to digress for an instant, I will ask you to freshen my memory upon a question which, being a resident of Honolulu, you may be in the way of answering. I cannot recall the name of —"

"If you will pardon me, Lieutenant," came the Chinaman's smooth voice, interrupting, "it is unlikely that I could refresh

your memory with any name whatever, since we are strangers and the only third party in our acquaintance is the lady whose letter of course speaks for her much more warrantably than it would become me to do."

If he saw the bafflement in my eyes, the effect was only to increase his respectful courtesy. Replying to my stiff bow in acknowledgment of his last words, he proceeded:

"You are going to China?"

"Yes."

"You will be near Pekin."

"As near as a vessel can get."

He drummed with his long nails on the table a moment.

"What a pity it can't get any nearer!" he muttered grimly. "When our precious royal traitors in the Forbidden City throw the old empire to the dogs like a dish of scraps, the United States will be among those waiting at the water's edge to fight over the division — and a snapping, snarling, smoke-clouded roar of a fight it will be!" Then, throwing off this momentary bitterness, he continued: "But we will take things in their proper order. It is Pekin that I am aiming at, too — Pekin, the Forbidden City, which China's own people never see the inside of. I want you to go to Pekin for me on a very perilous mission. You will endanger not only your life but your position in the American navy, which I fancy you think the more of. Now, please," putting up his hand gracefully, as I would have spoken — "please remember that I have assured you it is something a gentleman and an officer may do with honor — and even with pride."

"Then out with it!" I demanded. "And let me get one thing at least fixed in my mind. What with all this talk of dreadful secrets, Forbidden Cities, perilous missions, women in yellow — but I beg your pardon; you did not — "

He coughed politely behind his jewelled hand.

"No," he replied. "I did not mention any woman in yellow."

"But the whole thing is too damned mysterious!" I cried, losing patience. "Come, man, I am waiting for the story."

"I will tell you first a little story of Pekin — a story which few white men ever hear correctly. China is ruled by a small band of Manchurian Tartars, who conquered us in the early days when

they were a brave and warlike people. Now they are degenerate with dissipation. They are abandoned to a life of profligacy and idleness, while China stagnates for the want of legislation. They have kept the empire at a standstill for centuries. The people of China obey them because it has been in their religion for five thousand years to obey without question the voice from the throne, whosoever it might be. Just now this voice is a woman's. Some years ago she was a concubine of the palace — nothing more. A son was born to her. A son was born also to the Empress. It was feared that the illegitimate prince might supplant the real one, and the Empress asked that both he and his mother be removed. The world has seen how they were removed; the Emperor himself and then the Empress were spirited away, and the concubine was proclaimed Dowager Empress, with the nine-year-old prince and her own child sharing the palace with her as the 'Royal Family.' Inside the main city of Pekin, which is like any other Chinese city, is a smaller city, barricaded and barred. Within live the Tartar tyrants. They will not see us; they will not speak to us. Always until now we have had the right to petition the Royal Court for legislation; but the Dowager has taken even that scant privilege away from us. They discourage road making, so that the city will be kept inaccessible to travellers from a distance. As it was a thousand years ago, so it is to-day — held suspended in the grasp of poetry; for those who should be making laws for us are sunk in a perpetual revel of rhapsody."

"Is not Pekin accessible by rail?"

"Within the present year one little line has been opened to Tien-Tsin — that is all."

"How about the telegraph?"

He drew a paper from his sleeve and said, "Read that."

I read the following message:

Form No. 101. Western Union Telegraph Office,
San Francisco, Feb. 18, 18—.

Mr. T. E. Black:

Your dispatch dated Feb. 17th to Tsung Li Yamen is undelivered. Reason — Was stopped at Shanghai by Chinese Government authorities because dangerous to security of state.

"A," Receiver W. U. Co.

"It was a message written in Honolulu by a powerful Chinese society and sent by mail to San Francisco for transmission by cable

to the Forbidden City. It was a petition to the Royal Court — and you see how it fared," said my visitor.

"Why don't you tackle them in some other way — with a balloon, for instance?" I asked, lightly.

"We have done so — with an airship," he replied, calmly.

I stared at him. "You have?" I cried.

"Do you remember," he said, "of hearing of an airship competition held in San Francisco last year under the direction of one of the newspapers — at which a man named Stanley turned out a machine that would actually fly? And do you remember that as soon as it was discovered, and was on the point of creating a sensation, it suddenly disappeared?"

"I recall something of the incident."

"Well, the world lost a prize for which it had been waiting for a hundred years, and I gained it. It was a Chinese secret organization that swallowed up your airship, through your humble servant." He bowed, then his face underwent a remarkable change and he sprang to his feet. "It was accurst!" he cried — "accurst with a thousand devils! It brought us ruin; there was evil in every line of it, and it mocked us when it had us damned and broken under its foul trickery! We had it built on an island here and we took it to China. We flew straight to the Forbidden City, gloriously indifferent alike to bad roads and to Sacred Walls. We landed squarely on the very palace itself. The whole city fell on its face, even the bold Tartars quivering in the dust with the rest. Then we came away.

"I cannot tell you what we did in the Forbidden City; suffice that we made an awful mistake, and instead of striking a blow for the salvation of our country, we committed a hideous error — an error which may result in its speedier ruin. When we discovered this we fell upon the evil monster that had tricked us, and beat and burnt it until not a vestige remained. But that did not right the wrong we had done, nor is it in the power of any Chinaman to do so without losing his life in the undertaking."

"I see," I said, "and you wish me to right it for you?"

"Precisely," was his reply. "And unless you can do it, I say to you again that my country is forever robbed of the one hope it had for salvation before we took it away."

"And you think I can do all this?"

"I think you can, else you may be sure I would never trust the matter and all our lives in your hands. And now good-night," he said, abruptly rising and holding out his hand — "to-morrow afternoon, an hour before you sail, I will bring to you a paper which I pray to your God and mine you will get safely delivered into the Forbidden City. In the meantime remember all I have told you of the eyes which gleam through the Sacred Walls six thousand miles away, and be as careful of your countenance as though you saw them actually looking at you right across the table, even as I am looking at you now."

I raised my eyes sharply and looked across the cabin into darkness — the Chinaman had disappeared.

He came aboard next day at the appointed time, and was in my cabin with the door shut behind him before I had heard the sound of his coming. He had with him a little Chinese boy.

"Lieutenant," he said, "this boy will be your companion to the Forbidden City. He will be your servant, interpreter and guide. You cannot do better than to keep him constantly near you. Here, also, is something that you should not part with, day or night, while you are away" — and he handed me a long, slim object, wrapped in silk cloth — "and, finally, here is the memorial which you are to present to the Empress Dowager. Should she demand of you personal proof of what it contains, you will repeat these words: 'The Flying Devil can never visit the Sacred City again, for I myself have seen where it was destroyed by Your Majesty's loyal subjects in a far-off island. Believe in them, Your Majesty, smile with favor on them, and the Flying Devil will never bother you again.' After that you will do well to leave Pekin as speedily as possible — and no more can I tell you."

"But here?" I said, holding up the long parcel.

"It is a sword," he replied; "and there are only ten like it in the world. In China you may kill whom you please with it under the absolute protection of the Royal Court. The possessor of it is exempt from the law, and can slay without question or hindrance. In most cases the bare sight of it is enough to disperse a mob; and the boldest Chinese noble will tremble when it is unsheathed. Keep it always; keep the boy always near you;

and remember the memorial. This bag contains an incidental element of your equipment." He rolled a leather sack from his sleeve. Then he held out his hand.

"I will leave you now, Lieutenant," he said, looking me steadily in the eyes; and I fancied the steadiness of the glance was meant to hide the quaver of his voice, which I now detected for the first time. "You are a brave man, and a reckless one — but you are cool, too, and that is better than all. My life is in your hands — mine and many others — and something infinitely greater than our lives, which I cannot explain to you now. If you find it out you must still trust me and go right ahead without wavering. And now good-bye — good-bye."

With his face turned away from me, he wrung my hand; then in an instant he had fallen to his knees and mumbled something in Chinese in a low voice. The next moment he was on his feet again — and a moment later he was gone.

The Chinese boy stood stock still and stared into vacancy, with all the air of one who was left utterly alone. I commended him to his thoughts while I examined into the bag on the table and counted the money it contained — a matter it is never well to neglect. There were ninety-nine thousand dollars in paper and one thousand dollars in gold. This was the "incidental element" of my equipment! I next unsheathed the magic sword (about which I had read, by the way) and saw that it was of gold, set with precious stones. While I was gazing at it I caught the Chinese boy's eyes on my face. He looked away again, but returned the glance when he thought I had ceased to regard him; then he pretended to look out of the window.

"Come here, Hop-o'-my-Thumb," I said, finally, "and get acquainted. What is your name?"

He whirled about, seemed to catch himself in too hasty a movement, let the sudden animation die away, and approached me with a step which was ostentatiously respectful, but which I could swear was without the least timidity or humility.

"My name," he said, in easy English; "well, the lady called me Woe Me."

"Woe Me, eh? And what lady called you that?"

"She in whose house I worked in Honolulu."

"So you have been a house servant, have you?"

He gazed at me curiously before replying, with his lips drawn tight against his teeth.

"Yes," he said, "that is what I have been."

"Well, you seem a likely enough shaver. I guess you can hit it off with me all right, can't you? I shan't want you to do a great deal — in fact, you may do about as you please — only just hang around the cabin here and keep out of the other men's way. Things will be quiet until we get to Chifu. Then you are to show me the way to Pekin, and talk Chinese for me to those at the gates. Are you afraid of the Forbidden City?"

"No."

"Bully for you, then," I said; "for, to tell you the truth I am, after listening to our friend Mr. Fuey for an evening."

"Chin Fuey is a fool."

Contempt and indifference were in the boy's face as he delivered himself of his observation. I stared at him with such amazement that he turned abruptly away and betook himself to the window. I had to put him down as a homesick little duffer, who would have time to improve his temper on the way over; and with this conclusion I left him, after stowing away the various articles which the elder Chinaman had confided to my care.

Gradually the lad did burnish up his lights as we left Honolulu. He had a preternaturally grave expression for his years, and something furtive in his eyes which kept him ever a stranger to me, though on the surface he smiled at my advances and made me understand that he appreciated my sociable intentions. He frequently made a show of waiting on me, especially if any of the other officers were around; but he did this with an awkwardness that never failed to make me smile, and then to scratch my head in puzzled reflection for a half hour afterwards. He seemed best contented when left alone to gaze from my cabin window out over the water toward the west; and whenever I could catch a glimpse of his face at such times I discovered on it a look of mature exaltation which lingered in my mind for hours thereafter, and transformed the boy's personality entirely. But always as soon as I talked with him he changed back into the stolid Oriental child again, who was willing to blacken my boots if I asked him, or

listen at my knees with patient attention while I read aloud from one of Stevenson's novels. And in this latter occupation we passed much of the time between Honolulu and Chifu, only one incident arising to shake the even tenor of the voyage.

This occurred one morning while I was on duty in another part of the vessel. The first I knew of it was when I returned to the cabin and found the ship's Chinese cook lying face downward on the floor, and my Chinese boy standing very stiff at his head and giving the prostate man one of his feet for a pillow.

"Here!" I cried, "what's the row now?"

I sprang into the room, caught the heathen by the loose of the clothes and pitched him out of the door. The boy fell back, flushed angrily and seemed on the point of striking me — and then I saw that he had the fatal sword in his hand. But he caught himself almost instantly, dropped his chin on his breast and sat down in a chair behind the table.

"Come, Woe Me," I said, wonderingly, "what the devil were you doing to that Chinaman? And how came he here in my cabin, where he was never known to have any business?"

"I know not why the dog came in," said the boy, sullenly. "A little more and I had killed him for it."

"But he came to see you," I said.

"Then he had better not come again," was the reply. "I found the slave looking in at the door with a laugh on his face as though I — *I* — " and he stamped his foot and sprang up from the chair — "were to be the plaything of any coolie swine that chanced along. You may see in your mind his prostration when I spoke to him — just three words — and showed him the hilt of the sword. Ugh!" — and he ground his teeth — "I will have a prize offered for the inventing of a death which it were suitable such a beast should die."

Now here was a fine play of airs, quotha! "And who are you to be babbling of prizes and killings?" I demanded. "Let us come to our senses and send the heathen cook back to his pots and pans, to which I will assist him with a boot if ever he comes so near to me again."

We reached Chifu in due season and I had no difficulty in securing a leave of absence for ten days. Putting the sword in

my scabbard, the memorial inside my shirt, and the money in my several pockets, I took Woe Me by the hand and boldly set foot on Chinese soil.

I could not help thinking, as I let this small guide lead me in search of a conveyance, that I was a precious fool for my pains; and I looked back once at the white warship lying so big and secure out there in the water and felt that here was nothing short of sheer madness, my leaving it behind me to plunge off alone into a wilderness of pagans, to knock at the gates of the Tartar dragons, to risk bringing all of China swarming about my ears and perhaps stirring up an international mess that would draw my own country's foot into it and cause my name to be damned down the ages as my body was likely to be kicked down the Sacred Palace stairs.

But somehow, as I gazed, a flutter of yellow grew upon the deck of the warship and the beautiful form of a woman filled into it like a swelling bud, which bloomed upon my senses so that when I shut my eyes I could feel the fulness of it in my arms and the fragrance of it upon my cheek, as I had held it in the dance of the masqueraders at the Honolulu ball. And although I was never what any one could call a sentimental man, I will say right here that the ability to see visions comes once into the life of every man living, and when it came to me out there on the Chifu dock I took it that my time had arrived to be a fool, and there was an end of reason until I was over it.

So the Woman in Yellow beckoned me to go on, and I went on.

The youngster secured two donkeys and drivers and got us started out on an evil little trail, himself riding in front and maintaining a fine silence. I wondered if he knew what we were going for, or if he had any idea of it. He had never asked me any questions, and of course I had never asked any of him, preferring in any event that a man, and an officer at that, should never have to go to a child for information about his own business. He was my guide, and I would let him do all the guiding he pleased to, and with all the fine airs he might choose to put into it, since doubtless his young heart found a relish in the importance of the responsibility — and with these reflections I resigned myself to the dull landscape and the task of keeping awake.

Late in the afternoon, as we drew near a town, Woe Me came back to me and spoke.

"We will go faster, if you please," he said. "I like not the looks of the scenery."

"What's the matter with the scenery?"

"I saw a bush that was alive," was his impassive response. "We will get some coolies here and make them run with us."

He had them engaged as soon as we struck the village, and we were out upon the road at a run in a little while. Thence we made a lively dash of it and travelled far into the night before halting for repose.

"Do you see any more live bushes?" I asked Woe Me the next morning, after we were on the road again.

"My eyes are tired with looking," he replied, "and I save them for the morrow."

"What shall we see on the morrow?"

"The Forbidden City."

This was well enough, and I said no more. Nor did any adventure befall us until, on the following day, we ran into the outer city of Pekin and pattered through its suburbs toward the Sacred Walls.

It was here that Woe Me made his coolies fall back so that his chair was alongside my own and by reaching out his hand he could touch me. He gave me an inscrutable glance out of his grave eyes, as much as to ask if I were ready for what might come; inspected my person from head to heel; placed his hand on his hip, as if in a reminder; once more looked me in the face and then impulsively held out his hand.

"You have been good to me," he said, simply. "I will save you if I can. Come on."

You may try to imagine my feelings as the coolies swung into a fast run again and bore us rapidly to the end of our journey.

"The gates," I heard the boy mutter, and he craned his neck forward; then he swept the neighborhood with an eagle's glance and brought up with a sharp eye on my face once more.

"They are closing in on you," he said, in a voice that startled me by a mysterious change it had taken — for it was now that of a stranger, who was yet a friend, but whose quarrel was not mine, nor mine his, and who could see the fight only as a bystander.

Yet there was an authority and strength in the tone which rang a confidence into me, and made me grip my sword with a very demon's strength and fury.

"Let them come, then!" I cried, springing out of my chair. "Let them come, and they'll need all their wooden gods to help the first dozen that reach me!"

I saw a hundred Mongolians closing ahead of me as I ran for the great gates. It did not occur to me then to wonder how they had found me out. I had expected trouble, and here it was; and that was all I could grasp at the moment. Forward I plunged into their very faces before the situation took any definite form at all — then in a flash, right there ahead of me, I saw a face that I knew, the face of the Chinese cook on the *Wisconsin!* He pointed at me, jabbering excitedly, and motioning the mob to close in. My mind, strangly enough, cleared at the sight of his treacherous features. By the time the ringleaders of the mob reached me I was in that superb command of myself which makes an American officer the match of any hundred savages alive. Right and left I struck with a most beautiful swinging stroke, till a half-circle was cleared before me in a twinkling, and carpeted with as many as eight or nine of the coolies woven in a squirming heap.

"So," I cried, tapping my yellow gentleman of the ship's kitchen on the head as he lay gasping up at me in the temporary lull. "Here is a fine piece of business, your trying to mob an officer of the ship! What do you mean by it, you son of moon-eyed evil?"

His answer was as unexpected as it was disastrous. He reached out suddenly, caught me by the foot, and jerked me to the ground, where in an instant I was set upon and nearly smothered by a score of my foes. Here would have been the end of me in another second, had not things changed in a startling and magical way.

"Dogs!" I heard a voice ring out — then a thunderous command in the Chinese tongue, followed by the twang of a sword. I felt the Mongolians pile off me as though they were lifted by the hair by some great hand from above. Springing erect, I met an astonishing sight. Every mother's son of a coolie was lying flat on his face, while my little Chinese guide stood on a hillock near the big gates and looked down upon them.

"Dogs!" he said again in English — it was a word he was fonder of in that tongue than in his own. "Come here, you that they call the Lieutenant."

I stepped over the backs of about twenty Chinamen and approached him speechless. He handed me back the sword I had lost.

"I could not let you be killed before my eyes," he said. "But you must go now back to your ship. These slaves will go with you, and — " lifting his voice so that the ship's cook might hear — "if any harm comes to you not one of them shall remain alive to see another sun, nor shall his brothers, nor his sisters, nor his children, nor his parents, nor any one of his people many times removed. As for you," went on the speaker, in a lower tone, while the coolies lay as motionless as the dead, "as for you, my friend, you have been deceived long enough. The game is over now, or will be as soon as these gates open, and I shall never see you again. It did not end as I could have wished — I wanted you to deliver the memorial and go undeceived away — but now that is spoiled, and I may tell you that the memorial is worthless. And so, good-bye, for you must go quickly."

"But you?" I exclaimed.

"I stay here," he said.

"Chin Fuey said nothing of this!" I cried; "and the lady — the lady in yellow — I — "

"Chin Fuey made one great mistake, as he told you," the boy interrupted. "He has now rectified it as far as he could, thanks to you."

"And this terrible danger he feared?"

"Is past."

I could not understand it. Either my guide or myself had gone stark mad in the recent bad doings; and when I looked at the coolies lying prone on their faces at our feet I concluded that it must have been myself.

"You may keep my sword," were my companion's next words; "for you are not yet safe yourself. And here is a card which I promised a lady in Honolulu I would give you if ever I should stand with you before the gates of the Forbidden City, as I am standing now. Again I thank you — "

Suddenly the big gates swung back, and two richly dressed Chinese priests stood in the opening. No sooner had they seen my companion than they gave a great start, threw up their hands in the wildest terror and fell to their knees trembling. The boy spoke to them in Chinese. Slowly intelligence came back into their faces and they arose.

"Be careful," I heard the boy whisper in English. "Use your sword if necessary."

There followed a lively palaver between the first of the priests and my little companion, while the other Celestial kept his eyes on me in a way I did not like. Evidently the talk was about me, and it grew louder and more violent until the boy went straight up to his man and waved a hand in his face. The man hesitated, the boy's eyes flashed, the big one's knees gave way and down he sank in an attitude of submission. His eyes caught mine, though, and snapped spitefully in an outlet of chagrin over his defeat. Quick as a flash the other priest, at a signal, sprang at me with a whirling sword, which I barely had time to catch on my own; and in a trice we were fighting like two tigers.

He wielded no mean blade, did this Mongolian, having been nursed in a cradle of preparation for the royal guard. Clash upon clash we dealt, using the slashing blow, which promised a speedier result if it did strike short of skill on the other hand. And it was my superior strength which presently told on him by this reckoning; for in the time you could count ten I had beaten over his guard and caught him a full sweep fair on the neck; and down he went in two pieces as clean cut as a sliced carrot. Instantly the other priest was on his feet, with a whistle to his lips, but I jammed the hilt of the sacred sword in his face and leapt past him to the boy, who was beckoning me.

"Run!" he said. "Good-bye — you have done as a brave man should. Now go — and go as fast as you can."

He shouted something in Chinese, at which all the prostrate coolies sprang to their feet and formed a guard around me. And so, leaving my strange little guide standing in the royal gateway, with the richly robed priest kneeling at his feet, I set out on my return to Chifu.

. . . . . .

Six months later the *Wisconsin* dropped anchor in Honolulu harbor. I went straightway to the address written on the card which the Chinese boy had given me, and was ushered into an American drawing-room. The skirt of a woman's gown brushed the threshold, and before me stood — the Woman in Yellow.

"I was expecting you, Lieutenant," she said, giving me her hands, "and so you have really come back, after entering the gates of — shall I say the awful word? — and performing a deed that few men could have done, and no man will ever have the chance to do again."

"Madam," I said, trying to look through her mask — for she had put it on with the rest of the costume especially for my reception — "your words are as meaningless to me now as they were six months ago, when I was setting out on this wild-goose chase you are pleased to make so much of. So far as I can see, I have done nothing but make a fool of myself, and how I escaped getting killed as I deserved is not the least part of the mystery. But I have gone through with it, as you see, and here I am back in Honolulu to claim what I may from the Woman in Yellow — which I believe were the terms of our contract."

When I had finished I felt her trembling and saw the white of her neck and shoulders turn pink clear up to the yellow mask.

"And what will you claim?" she asked in a very small voice. But before I could answer, she had snatched one of her hands loose and placed it protestingly against my breast. "No," she said, "not yet. Tell me first about my Chinese boy. You did not bring him back; then how can I live up to my side of the bargain?"

"It was no such bargain," I exclaimed, taking her hand again, "and you are but putting me off. Why do you call him your Chinese boy?"

"He was my house servant," she said; "my Woe Me."

"Oho! Was he?" I rejoined, "And where did you get him?"

"Mr. Fuey brought him from China in an airship," was her reply, "and gave him to me for a servant while in Honolulu."

"Brought him in an airship!" I repeated, light breaking in upon me. "So it was he that they stole in the Forbidden City in their 'flying devil'?"

"Yes, they mistook him for another boy."

"For the son of the Dowager Empress, I'll be bound!"

"Yes."

"And this boy I took back to China was — ?"

"The Emperor of China himself!"

After a dazed moment I asked her how she knew all this.

"Chin Fuey had to hide the boy somewhere away from Chinatown," she said, "and had to have friends aside from his own people to help him out of his trouble. He is an old friend of my father, and he chose us to be his confidantes and advisers. You know the rest — especially how I secured an escort for his little Chinese Majesty across the ocean."

"And how dare you confess all these secrets to me now," I demanded, still holding her, "since you would not six months ago?"

"Because you have come back," she whispered — "and I know what you came back for."

"What?"

"For me," she said, audaciously.

"Isn't it about time for you to take off that mask?"

"I'm afraid."

"Why?"

"Because they say in Honolulu that I am — am — rather pretty, you know — and — "

"Well?"

"And I'm afraid you might — kiss me."

"That I certainly shall do," I cried, "if what they say in Honolulu is but half true. Take off the mask!"

She took it off, and — well, if ever you chance to come to my village and see a retired naval officer and his wife sitting at twilight on the piazza of a cozy country mansion, you may judge for yourself about Honolulu's idea of beauty.

A Human Chameleon.*

BY NEWTON NEWKIRK.

HE was sleeping. As I stood over his cot a nurse told me he had come to the hospital the night before and asked to be given medical attention. He had the air and dress of a gentleman and tendered in advance the money for his treatment. More of him than this I did not learn.

When the nurse moved away I seated myself and, taking his hand, felt for the pulse. As I counted the beats my eyes were on the small hand of my watch. When I looked up his eyes were open and on mine.

"What is the pulsation, doctor?" he queried.

"One hundred and four."

"A trifle high?"

"Yes."

His voice was rich and had in it the accent of education and refinement.

"You will find the trouble here, doctor," and he patted the right side of his neck with a finger. Examination showed he was suffering from a small cancerous growth. I advised its removal when the fever symptoms had subsided, to which he readily acquiesced. As I turned to a small table and began to prescribe he reached out and touched my arm. There was a mingled look of concern and alarm in his face.

"Will you kindly go away for a few minutes, doctor — only a short while — will you?"

The pitiful quaver of entreaty in his tones for the moment overcame my curiosity at his strange request. I was about to invent some roundabout question which would bring out his reason for wanting me to withdraw, when his manner stopped me short. His hands and teeth were clenched and he strove with a mighty effort,

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like a man who fights off some strange spell. All the time he looked pleadingly into my eyes.

"Oh, doctor — won't you please go — for the sake of God — hasten!"

Turning quickly from my strange patient I crossed the floor and entered a large cabinet in the centre of the room in which drugs and supplies were kept. A man of medicine — especially a hospital physician — encounters numberless puzzling mental derangements in his experience and, for the time, I charged the new man's odd behavior to that side of the medical ledger. Nevertheless, my curiosity was aroused. Looking about I observed a small chink through the frame partition of the cabinet and clapped my eye to it instantly. I commanded a full view of the man I had just left. He was not more than thirty feet from me. There was a screen on either side of his cot which shut him off from the observation of other patients. He lay propped up, with his feet toward me and his hands lying on the snowy coverlet. I studied his face carefully. It was in natural repose. It was — ! I winked in rapid succession to remove a blur from before my vision and looked again.

The man's head was gone!

I drew quickly back from the chink and examined it to make sure there was certainly a hole there. Then I put my eye to the opening again. The head remained missing! His hands — ! They, too, were absent! Both seemed to be severed where the sleeves of his sleeping gown ended and the white coverlet began. When I looked again for the head I plainly saw the collar, but above it was neither neck nor head! Where the head should have been I saw the surface of the white pillow and the vertical iron rungs of the bed-head. Then I glanced down at myself to see if I were really the being I seemed to be. When I peeped again through the hole I beheld no longer the headless and handless man. Those members were again in place. He was looking toward the cabinet and I saw his lips frame the word "Doctor!" He was calling me.

I stopped long enough to wipe away the perspiration which had gathered on my forehead and, stepping out, walked toward him with as much of an air of unconcern as I could assume.

"Thank you," he said, simply. His very tone would have conveyed the sense of deepest gratitude if he had said "Apples." After writing out the prescription I left him.

When I had finished my rounds I examined the hospital register. My headless patient was entered in the name of Emanuel Riccardo, of Florence, Italy. I could not dismiss him from my mind and sought some pretext to visit him again that night. He was lying quite still, yet not asleep, and greeted me with a smile. I sat down and engaged him in conversation. I found Signor Riccardo the most fascinating and brilliant man I have ever met. In a short hour he took me all the way around the habitable globe, shifting the scenes east and west on the continents, or from the scent-laden atmosphere of the tropics to the frozen zones of the polar regions. I listened in rapture and left him regretfully. For the time I forgot the inexplicable occurrence of the morning, to which he made no reference. I had a natural and professional curiosity to unravel the uncanny mystery, but it was obvious that Signor Riccardo wished me not to know, and common courtesy forbade me trying to draw from him his peculiar secret.

Another time — three days later — as I sat near his cot with my back to him, writing at the stand, a peculiar quaver in his voice as he talked made me turn my eyes quickly toward him.

"Don't look at me, doctor — please — not now!" he pleaded.

He had spoken too late. My eyes were upon him as he uttered the words. His head was gone, but the voice came from where it should have been. He held up one handless arm in protest as I gazed stupidly at the headless trunk. Then the invisible fingers clutched the coverlet and pulled it completely over him. I turned away and tried to write, but my hand trembled, and laying down the pen I waited during what seemed an interminable period. I heard the clothing being adjusted behind me and when I looked around his eyes were closed. He feigned sleep, and I left him.

Two days afterward, Miss West, the nurse in charge of Signor Riccardo's ward, entered my office, white and trembling. This was an unusual manifestation on the part of a trained attendant, to whom surgery and even deaths were merely details of hospital work. The girl sank weakly into a chair and gazed at me strangely.

"Am I myself, doctor, or — is it true?"

Then she plunged on as if I could understand, and I believed I knew what was coming.

"When it happened the first time I thought I must have been deceived, but now — not ten minutes ago — when I came to his cot suddenly, the head and the hands were gone. Oh, it was dreadful!"

"You mean —?" I queried.

"Riccardo!" she gasped.

. . . . . .

He lay quietly on the operating table with his fine, swarthy face toward the stand on which I arranged my instruments. Miss West stood with bottle and muzzle ready to administer the anæsthetic when I should give the word. He was cheerful and talked glibly. I had assured him the operation would be in no wise difficult or dangerous, which was true, and the last words which came from under the muzzle were, "I have breathed worse things — and better."

In a few minutes he was deep under, yet the nurse still held the muzzle over his nostrils as I turned to a stand to choose my instrument. I heard her try to call me, and faced about quickly. Miss West was shrinking away from the prostrate figure. She had left the muzzle lying on the face — not on the face — there was no face — nor head! The muzzle seemed to be floating in mid-air where the face should have been. The handless arms were lying at his sides.

I strove to master a nameless feeling as I advanced to the memberless figure, and lifting the muzzle, placed my hand against — against the nose, which I felt without seeing! Moving my fingers over the invisible face, I traced the chin, the moustache, the rounded cheeks, the depressions of the eyes, the forehead — and felt, as plainly as the sense of touch can convey, the thick, wavy hair of Signor Riccardo's head. Then I sought the hands and held each in turn. I could count their fingers and feel their warmth, but to my eyes I seemed to hold but air. The room was bathed in bright light, yet it was as if I felt the head and hands of a man with my eyes closed or in intense darkness. Readjusting the muzzle I waited for the strange spell to pass. The

nurse stood apart, trembling, but when the head and hands began to outline themselves from apparent nothingness to visible flesh and blood, she gave her attention to administering the anæsthetic.

With the return of Signor Riccardo's head and hands he began to communicate his subconscious vagaries in speech and the first words arrested me as I stood over him, knife in hand.

"They said the curse would follow me — to my death, but I did not believe! I had rather died on that lonely island than be shunned by man and pointed out as one bewitched. It there no cure — in the name of God — is there no help?"

A sudden thought came to me; I would question his "sleeping-self" — his *alter ego!*

"There is help, Riccardo!" I said in loud, distinct tones. His face seemed to beam with a great hope, although he was yet under the influence of the drug and his eyes were closed.

"Help — for me?" he questioned, eagerly.

"Yes!"

"How?"

"You must answer my questions."

"I will!"

"What is this curse?"

"The Chameleon fever!"

"Where did it overtake you?"

"Madagascar — I was exploring the interior for diamonds — you say you can cure me?"

"Yes — what is this Chameleon fever?"

"Those who have had it are doomed to strange spells which they cannot control, during which the exposed portions of the body take on the color of the backgrounds against which they rest. This gives the flesh the appearance of having vanished altogether."

"Do you suffer while these spells last?"

"No — can you cure me?"

"I will try; now lie very still!"

In wonderment I began to operate. At the first incision I observed a structure in Signor Riccardo's skin different from anything I had ever read of or met with in histology. When the

nurse had brought me a powerful magnifying glass I examined it minutely. Instead of one secondary stratum of cuticle where I would look for the coloring matter of the skin, there were many layers, and each seemed to hold a different hue of pigment — a condition I had never met or heard of. I could understand how the exudations of vari-colored pigments from these different layers might so blend as to give the surface of the skin the complexion of surrounding objects, and thus render it invisible, like that of a chameleon. Anxious as I was to pursue this strange freak of physical structure, I discharged it to proceed with the operation.

Signor Riccardo recovered rapidly, and at the end of two weeks was ready to be discharged. As he grasped my hand at parting he looked into my eyes as if there were something he would tell me. Suddenly he seemed to think better of it.

"Good-bye, doctor!" he said, cheerily. "If I have acted strangely at times I hope you will yet think well of me. It was — something — something beyond my control — Good-bye!"

And the "Human Chameleon" pressed my hand and was gone on his wanderings. Some day I shall visit Madagascar to study that strangest of all human maladies — Chameleon fever.

Mr. Corndropper's Hired Man.*

(A Companion to "Ely's Automatic Housemaid.")

BY W. M. STANNARD.

THERE was a mild sensation at the East Slowcumbe railway station when a stranger, bearing a two-gallon can, carefully crated, stepped off the 3.30 accommodation, and there were many speculations hazarded as to his identity, business and destination, but, without stopping to question or exchange words with any of the waiting crowd, he stepped across the platform to where Farmer Corndropper was waiting with his gray mare and buggy. He handed the farmer a letter, stepped into the buggy and was driven slowly away. Without a word of welcome or of apology to his visitor, the farmer opened the letter and proceeded intently to read the contents:

> DEAR SIR: — We forward you herewith — or, rather this will be handed to you by — Tom, our Automatic Farmer (Ely's patent). If same proves unsatisfactory after one month's constant use, money will be refunded. The active principle by which the farmer is controlled is contained in an oil (two gallons forwarded) embodying all the essential nutritive elements which, acting upon our improved substitute for cerebral tissue, contained in the farmer's cranial cavity, results in a faculty which cannot be distinguished from ordinary common sense.
>
> Tom is guaranteed to do twenty-four hours' work a day — seven days a week, if necessary — without strain. He can perform any ordinary task that an intelligent man can do.
>
> IMPORTANT. — The automatic farmer will obey *only* the person who feeds him. His present control expires at 6 P. M. to-day, after which hour he will be subject to your orders.
>
> Convinced that Tom will give perfect satisfaction, we remain,
>
> Yours sincerely,
>
> THE ELY MFG. CO. (Limited).

Josiah Corndropper meditatively folded and pocketed this letter, clucked to the gray mare and fixed his gaze upon his silent companion, who, however, paid no heed. He was tall, broad-shouldered and robust looking, with a wonderfully intelligent and life-like countenance, upon which his owner gazed with wonder and admiration.

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Tom promptly followed his master when he alighted at the farmhouse and seated himself in a corner of the kitchen, where he remained, dumb and deaf to all the subdued comments upon his appearance and deportment.

"No, M'riar," answered the farmer to his wife's enquiries, "he won't be ready t'use t'll six o'clock, so ye'll hev ter wait," and she returned reluctantly to her duties.

At six o'clock, sharp, following the printed directions stitched to the back of Tom's vest, Josiah cautiously lifted the brim of his straw hat, poured some "food" into the aperture disclosed and stepped back to await results.

Instantly the figure gazed curiously around and then sat upright at attention, regarding his owner enquiringly.

"Gid up!" said Josiah.

Tom promptly arose and the farmer and his wife stumbled over the furniture in the involuntary backward movement which they simultaneously made.

"What *you* laughin' fer, drat yer?" shouted Josiah, regaining his equilibrium, but the automaton made no response.

"Waal, he don't talk back, like some hired men," exclaimed Mrs. Corndropper, amused and relieved.

"Course, he's only a machine," said the farmer, mollified. "Tom, go milk the cows."

This order was obeyed with neatness and dispatch. Four great pails were soon standing on the dairy floor, and Tom was awaiting further instructions.

"Waal, by gum, ye do work mighty spry," ejaculated Josiah. "Ye might 's well go out an' finish the chores," and Tom was gone like a flash. Soon the wood box was brimming, the animals foddered, and all the odds and ends of the day's work attended to in less than half the usual time, and the indefatigable farmer had again reported for duty.

Josiah scratched his head reflectively. "Able to work all night, is he? Guess I'll set him t' buildin' stun wall. Here, Tom, go out 'n straighten out th' wall around the ten-acre lot. Then in the mornin', 'bout four o'clock, come in an' wait at the back door, till I give ye su'thin' else t' do." Tom was out of sight in the direction of the ten-acre lot before Corndropper had done wondering.

When Josiah came down in the morning the first thing he saw was the automaton, standing stolidly on the back porch, evidently awaiting orders.

"Mornin', Tom. It's time ter milk an' do up the chores ag'in. Seems ez ef as intelligent-lookin' a cuss ez you be would almost 'a known it 'thout bein' told." Before this mild criticism, the only reproof which his owner ever bestowed upon him, was finished, Tom was in the barnyard, dispatching the work.

"Waal, by gum!" chuckled Corndropper, "an' only costs six cents a day, nuther. Gee, ef this ain't a snap." He scanned all he could see of the stone wall, and soliloquized:

"I b'leeve he's done it all right. I must set him 'bout the farmin' right away; won't need t'hire nobody this season!" and Josiah smiled audibly over the saving of three men's hire as he went in to breakfast.

Picking his teeth on the porch, he said to his patient helper:

"Waal, Tommy, may's well start in plowin' to-day. Yoke up th' three-year olds, an' then I'll tell ye what ter do."

But Tom did not move.

"What ails ye?"

Josiah was alarmed. Could the machinery be out of order so soon? Was the thing a failure, after all? Visions of disappointed hopes flitted through his mind faster than he could formulate them, but as he stood in thought he happened to glance at the clock. The automaton must be fed regularly twice in twenty-four hours or it would "strike."

"Waal, by gum! Why didn't I think of that before?"

So Tom had his breakfast at once, after which he went to the barn and under fresh instructions returned with the astonished animals and with the big plow under one arm.

"Waal, by gum!" exclaimed Josiah.

As the days went on Tom plowed and planted, hoed, hayed and harvested, with no assistance other than general directions. He did all the "chores," indoors and out, and when farm work was slack, made a firm friend of Mrs. Corndropper by beating carpets, moving furniture, scrubbing paint and blacking stoves.

Josiah thoroughly enjoyed the change. From being a hard-worked farmer, with three hired men to look after, he became a

man of leisure, giving his attention to the settlement of important local and national affairs — at the village grocery.

Spring had passed, summer had come and gone, and autumn was waning, when one brisk October morning Josiah announced:

"I'm a-goin' over ter th' county seat to-day, to see 'bout cancellin' that morgidge — we've made 'nough this summer to pay it off — an' as I hain't nothin' special for Tom t'do, I'm a-goin' ter leave him fer you."

"Now, Josiah, you needn't do no sech thing! Don't you think I c'n look out f'r myself, 'thout havin' a iron man 'round t' keep tabs on me?"

Josiah saw that something was wrong.

"No, M'riar, I thought mebbe you'd hev suthin' fer him t' do."

She said at first that she hadn't, but the truth was, that having had no experience in "feeding" Tom, the act upon which his obedience depended, she rather dreaded the responsibility.

Josiah perceived her reluctance, and took a firm stand.

"Now, M'riar, I want ye to come right out and feed him; might as well larn fust as last. Needn't use him ef y' don't want'er."

So Mrs. Corndropper meekly accompanied her husband to Tom's quarters and fed the automaton, who then, at her command, sat in a kitchen corner to be ready in case of need.

"Don't fergit ter hev him do the chores," said her husband, as he drove off.

When she was actually alone, she found the silence oppressive. Her thoughts, in spite of her best intentions, ran on the many depredations recently committed in neighboring towns, and supposed to be the work of tramps, and though she had never been molested by any of the fraternity, she could not help feeling apprehensive.

"I wish't old Grip was here," she thought, forgetting Tom entirely; "he use ter seem almost human, an' would ha' been kinder comp'ny. Don't s'pose nuthin' 'll happen, but he'd be wuth two men t' lay out a tramp."

But toward eleven o'clock her fears were forgotten, and she was just about to peel the potatoes for dinner, when a shadow fell upon the threshold, and she turned to see her worst apprehensions

realized — there stood two of the dirtiest and most villanous-looking specimens of man she had ever seen.

"Please, mum, will yer gin us suthin' to eat?"

"I never feed tramps."

"Say, Bill, git onter dat!"

"Ef ye two don't git out pretty lively, I'll set th' dog on yer!"

The tramps indulged in a hearty laugh, and then one said, in a peremptory tone:

"Come, ole lady, trot out yer grub, or we'll help ourselves."

Mrs. Corndropper's temper, never of the mildest, was now strained beyond endurance, and she emptied the tin pan of potatoes and water over her visitors.

With the aid of a wet dish rag and two towels, she was soon bound, gagged and helpless, and was obliged to sit speechless in the kitchen while the tramps rummaged the pantry and gorged themselves on her abundant and unsurpassed cooking.

Then they proceeded to investigate the closets and dining-room for liquid refreshments and "boodle."

While both were busily engaged in ransacking the sideboard, an idea occurred to Mrs. Corndropper. Wriggling and twisting, she rubbed the towel binding her hands upon a projecting nail until it parted, and then quickly untied the one fastening her to the chair. She took out her gag as she stole quietly to the corner where Tom was sitting, and whispered in his ear.

The tramps had just discovered a plump stocking in a drawer of the sideboard, and were about appraising its contents.

"Gosh, Jim, dis is der stuff! Ain't we playin' in great — "

He dropped the stocking with a howl, as a sharp rap descended upon his head. There was a simultaneous yell from Jim, two more blows and two loud screams.

"Now, Tom, take 'em by the scruff o' the neck, and thump their heads together."

Howls, curses, kicks and blows were alike futile. The iron clutch kept its hold, and the thumps were delivered with clock-like regularity.

Mrs. Corndropper calmly superintended.

"Now, shake 'em up *well!*"

The motion of the automaton changed, and dislocated curses and

disconnected kicks, accompanied by the rattle of boots, heads and teeth, testified to the thoroughness of the shaking process.

"Take 'em outdoors and squeeze 'em," was the next order, and the smothered execrations that floated in through the window told of a literal execution of the command.

Mrs. Corndropper closed and locked the windows and doors, pocketed the key, and said to Tom:

"There, that'll do; pick 'em up and go along ahead o' me."

Tom had them under his arms like two grain sacks, and was half way to the gate. As he passed through, both tramps made vigorous efforts to hold on to the gate posts, but only badly wrenched arms and roars of pain resulted.

Then they began to beg and plead for pardon and release, but Mrs. Corndropper paid no attention, and the little procession entered the village surrounded by small boys, and soon attracted half the floating population. At the constable's door the tramps were handcuffed and committed to the lock-up, and Mrs. Corndropper entered a formal complaint.

Two weeks later she received the following letter:

MRS. JOSIAH CORNDROPPER,

Dear Madam: — Please find enclosed check for $500, being the amount of the joint reward offered by the towns of Enfield and Slowcumbe for the apprehension of James Sullivan and William McNulty, said desperadoes having been captured under your direction. Also please accept our thanks for your public-spirited action.

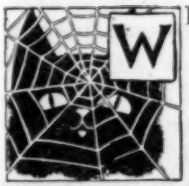
Yours respectfully,

HENRY HAWBUCK, *Town Treasurer.*

As no vote of thanks could be made intelligible to Tom, and no increase of rations would be grateful or necessary to his inner anthropomorphy, the Corndroppers were forced to be content with putting their appreciation into a testimonial to the Ely Mfg. Co. (Limited), and such public utterances as Josiah found time to make at the grocery, where he never tired of boasting of a hired man who could do the work of three, on six cents a day, and earn his employer a five hundred dollar premium the first year.

A Sister to the Borgias.*

BY JOANNA E. WOOD.



HEN many-millioned Athanasius Pack, sometime Senator, later Secretary of State, and finally Minister of the United States in Italy, leaned forward in his box at the Metropolitan Opera House to return the salutation of a friend, many eyes were focussed upon him. Men pointed him out, and enviously whispered the tale of his wonderful successes into the avid ears of their womenkind, who judged the story well illustrated by the size of Mrs. Pack's diamonds. It is a far cry and a long trail from a log cabin to the cabinet, but Athanasius Pack had made his voice heard all along the way. More, he had amassed millions *en route* and by some strange process of mental absorption (for he had never, of set purpose, studied) had acquired a more than superficial education. So that he was no unworthy representative of his great country even at the punctilious Court of Italy. All this, too, whilst he was a young man. For this prime favorite of hers Fortune forgot her freakish irony and filled his hands whilst he was yet young enough to enjoy her gifts.

Athanasius Pack again leaned back in his seat and gave, or seemed to give, his attention to the stage, whereon Melba and Saleza were singing Gounod's "Romeo and Juliet." In reality, Athanasius Pack was busy with certain problems in finance, but he had the splendid common-sense to assume good tastes if he had them not, and he was wont to congratulate himself upon his early formed habit of mental concentration, which enabled him to follow his own thoughts independently of his surroundings.

His wife and two daughters, gorgeously dressed, were with him. Mrs. Pack somehow suggested the cook-stove of the log-cabin — she had not the gift of assimilating culture like her husband — but

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $125 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending March 31, 1900.

her daughters were pretty creatures, American girls French polished. Between the acts their box was thronged, and Mr. Pack left with one of his visitors to take a turn in the *foyer*, making a splendid figure with his broad shoulders, his leonine head, his eyes and countenance full of irrepressible energy, his every step indicative of his bodily vigor, a lately bestowed foreign decoration indicated by an inch of crimson ribbon on his coat.

As the curtain went up he returned to his box — and five minutes later lay dead on its carpeted floor.

There was the greatest consternation. The call for a physician brought back Dr. Wetmore from his place in the parquet to the side of the man from whom he had but just parted in the *foyer*.

With the attendants, he carried the fallen man to the dressing room at the back of the box, and bidding Mrs. Pack and her daughters wait without, began a hasty and, as he realized from the first, useless attempt to find signs of life. There was no tremor of pulse or heart or eyelid. A dreadful instantaneous paralysis had arrested life at its floodtide, all the splendid vitality of the man was vanquished.

As Dr. Wetmore slipped his hand to his friend's breast a hard object, resting above the still heart, was in his way; he withdrew it hastily and saw smiling up at him the face of an exquisite woman, painted on ivory. Poor honest Mrs. Pack had never looked thus! Dr. Wetmore hurriedly slipped the tell-tale miniature into his pocket, and rose from his knees to tell the three trembling women what had befallen them. He was deeply thankful he had hidden the miniature when he saw Mrs. Pack, her coarse, good-humored face mottled in its pallor, fall upon her knees beside her husband's body, calling him "Thany! Thany!" as she had been wont to do when he stood straight and strong by the door of the old kitchen in the West, making love to her, as she, blowzy and coquettish, prepared dinner for the farm hands.

For a few days Gotham marvelled and babbled of the sudden death of Athanasius Pack; for a few issues the "scare-heads" of the yellow journals included his name; then a society scandal titillated the curiosity of the public, and the name of a fair but fickle dame figured in the headlines. But, as is sometimes the case, the newspapers, despite the detective methods of modern

journalism, missed the most interesting details regarding the death of Athanasius Pack. For example, its cause.

Now, in these days of over-strain, "heart trouble" has become a common dictum of the medical profession, and we all, knowing how fast is the age to which our hearts must keep time, accept it nothing doubting. A quorum of New York's best known physicians, with Dr. Wetmore at their head, had officially committed themselves to the "heart trouble" theory in the matter of Mr. Pack's death, but each said to the other that he had never known of such a case in his experience. Moreover, Dr. Wetmore, the dead man's familiar friend, remembering his persistent practice in athletic amusements, and having seen him climb mountains without a quickened breath, knowing, too, his inheritance of sturdy health, told himself that this was surely the most extraordinary case of unsuspected "heart trouble," and despite the fact that he had put his name to the official document giving the cause of death, found himself still wondering about it.

The will of Athanasius Pack was a formidable affair, disposing of many millions in a most methodical manner, preëminently the testament of a man in sound bodily and mental health, but with the will there was also a sealed envelope, containing, as the will explained, instructions to be carried out by Dr. Wetmore, who was named chief executor, and it was specifically set forth that Dr. Wetmore was to be allowed to draw from the estate such sums as would be necessary, in his discretion, to fulfil the intent of the testator, as explained in the sealed instructions. Dr. Wetmore solemnly accepted the trust, and upon opening the envelope found that he was requested to proceed to Italy, to search out there the Countess Sara d'Escalera, return to her the miniature of herself ("which," said the testator, "will be found on my dead body"), assuring her that it had ever been faithfully worn as she had wished, above the heart which loved her, that her premonition of eternal parting had been fulfilled, but that, as the writer had promised, her future was secured.

Then followed directions to Dr. Wetmore, instructing him to place five hundred thousand dollars to the credit of the Countess. Dr. Wetmore was to invest it for her in certain Italian securities, which were named, and was asked to place all unreservedly in the

hands of the Countess, that afterwards she might do as she would with both principal and interest. When Dr. Wetmore finished reading this he unlocked a drawer in his desk, and took thereout the miniature he had taken from the bosom of his dead friend. It was not now man's part to judge or condemn, and certainly this lovely, delicate, high-born beauty, with her slim shoulders and her disdainful chin, might well make even a stoic mad. The miniature was set in rather a cumbrous case of dull gold, fretted and pierced into a network of design, through the interstices of which could be seen a brightly burnished inner case. Dr. Wetmore looked long at the beautiful face, thinking of the contrast it presented to Mrs. Pack's honest, grief-blotched face as she knelt, calling her husband the fond, familiar name which had been so long forbidden, and between the painted face of one woman and the memoried face of the other there shone up always the impassive, sphinx-like countenance of the dead man. Dr. Wetmore sent the miniature to the Countess Sara d'Escalera at the address given in the letter, with the message, and added that he himself hoped to come to Italy very soon in fulfilment of his friend's wish. He told briefly the appalling fashion of Mr. Pack's death, and added that no one had seen the miniature but himself.

Dr. Wetmore indeed meant to leave for Italy almost immediately, but a serious illness supervened, other delays and accidents deterred him, and it was not till almost a year had passed that he found himself in Paris on the way to Italy. It was obvious that no third party might be called in, else the intent of extreme secrecy upon Mr. Pack's part would have been utterly defeated, and Dr. Wetmore had chafed against the many enforced delays, particularly as the Countess Sara, in a series of letters, each more pathetic and urgent than the last, protested against the procrastination.

One other commission Dr. Wetmore had in Italy — this one for Mrs. Pack. It was to select the statues to adorn the wonderful mausoleum which was being raised in memory of Athanasius Pack.

As Dr. Wetmore sipped his *café noir* in the dining-room of the Hotel Ritz the first evening of his arrival in Paris, he observed a man at a corner table regarding him closely. Something in the man's face stirred a dormant memory to vivid life, the eyes of the

two met, there was another second of indecision, then the two men rose simultaneously, for they had recognized each other. When both were ambitious students in Harvard, Caryl Dean had played Jonathan to the David of Henry Wetmore, and during all the years which had made Dean the foremost American-born sculptor and Wetmore a physician with a world-wide fame, they had corresponded intimately, but by a succession of curious causes had missed meeting a score of times, and now they were face to face! It was an emotional moment for both, and the heart of each rejoiced as he looked into the eyes of the other and saw there the same sympathy, the same perfect trust and comprehension which had bound them together in the old days. So it came about that, when they sat that night late in Dr. Wetmore's room, it was not of men and matters at large they talked, but of their own intimate affairs.

Wetmore was happily married, and after they had spoken of many things and Dean had told of the wealth his chisel and mallet had brought him, Wetmore laughingly rallied him on his bachelor condition.

"I will tell you about that, too," said Dean. "I love and am beloved by the most beautiful creature in Europe, in the world, for the matter of that. And think, Harry! She is married to a little, repulsive, misshapen Spanish gambler, a count, but woefully degenerate. Is it not cruel? Me — I would risk all and everything — but she will not leave him. She is not like many Italian women, but has a great idea of her duties. Our friendship has been the tenderest, most poetic, of relationships. She has a wonderful soul, and my love-making has been a matter of small observances — significant flowers, a sculptured Cupid, a perfect pearl, in symbol of herself. We have met every day for over two months, and when I was forced to leave, summoned here to get the details of my commission from the French Government, our parting was heart-breaking. She is the gentlest soul, and she was oppressed by a premonition that we would never meet again. Though they move in court circles they are very poor, and her wretch of a husband gambles all away, and many times she has confessed to me that their dilapidated palace has been bare of the necessities; think of it, Harry! She has let me give her help, taking it simply and lovingly as a child takes a gift from the hand

she loves. As she clung to me to say good-bye, she said: "I know we two will never met again, but I do not know whether you or I will be the one left, so I have written a paper and it is to make them give you my jewels if I die; it is all I have. I have often not had bread enough, but I've always had the jewels. If it is you who are taken, my beloved, it won't matter about me." The force of her foreboding struck home to my heart. I recognized how hopeless and helpless she would be without me — without the assistance it was my highest privilege to give. I soothed her and told her what I meant to do. She kissed my hand — the greatest honor I have ever had. I carried out my intention before I left Rome. I made a will leaving her everything I have, unreservedly. I delayed a night to do this, and saw her a few moments next morning. Then she gave me a precious parting gift, a miniature of herself. She asked me to wear it night and day above my heart, never to remove it for a second. I promised, but love like ours looks more to the spirit than the letter. She has heard of you often, she would not mind a breach in the observance of my promise in this case. I will show you, old chap, that my 'heroics' have ample justification in fact."

Dean thrust his hand into his breast and drew forth a case of dull gold, fretted and pierced in an elaborate design — a case which Dr. Wetmore knew well — so well that it unnerved him, and as he took the miniature from his friend's hand his fingers were uncertain, and he let it fall. At the instant it left his fingers there was a faint whirr, and then the miniature was vibrating about an inch above the smooth, leather-covered table by which they sat, supported upon a slender needle of steel, which had shot out of the case, and which, penetrating the leather, was caught and held by the wood beneath. Upon this the miniature case quivered, as do those butterflies mounted on spiral springs which women wear in their hair.

The men gazed at it, fascinated. Suddenly, Dean put forth his hand.

"Do not touch it on your life," cried Wetmore, pallid to the lips. "That needle is poisoned with the deadliest poison!"

Dean glared at him.

"You have gone mad," he said.

"Have I?" cried Wetmore excitedly. "Have I? That is the miniature of Countess Sara d'Escalera!"

"How in Heaven's name —" began Dean — but Wetmore was on his feet.

"How do I know?" he said. "I took it from the dead body of Athanasius Pack in the Metropolitan Opera House, when he was stricken dead by it in an instant. 'Heart trouble,' we called it. God! *It was murder!* I slipped the miniature into my pocket to save Mrs. Pack from seeing it! I sent it back to the murderess with a loving message from the dead man, to the effect that he had worn it night and day, as she had asked. This duty was laid on me in a sealed letter, to fulfil the other instructions of which I am here. For in poor Pack's case, as in yours, the Countess had a 'premonition' that they would not meet again, and because of this he left her five hundred thousand dollars to provide for her, to be given by me from the estate. That is my mission here, the cause of my coming abroad." He paused. "Oh, Caryl! To think if you had worn the accursed thing another ten minutes!"

Caryl Dean gazed at him with horror-stricken eyes and jaw half fallen.

"Proof!" he mumbled. Wetmore took from his pocket a thin packet wrapped in oiled silk. It contained the secret instructions to the trusted executor of Athanasius Pack.

Caryl Dean read them and groaned aloud. The two men looked at each other across the table. Between their haggard faces the fair pictured face smiled up from its rim of gold.

After a time Wetmore arose, and fetching his travelling case of instruments, selected a pair of fine surgical forceps. With these he caught the steel needle firmly. Then, as one might wrench the poison fangs from out a serpent, he held the miniature case gingerly in one hand, whilst by main force he wrenched the needle from its socket. There was another whirr, soft yet jangling, as the delicate time-mechanism within the case was disordered; the needle broke, and the fragment left sprang back.

"If I had a cat or —" began Wetmore.

In an instant Dean was out of the room, and in an incredibly short time was back with a miserable stray cat beneath his coat.

One prick with the needle point, and the cat instantly stiffened in death. Again the eyes of the two men met.

Next morning two men with the stern, sorrowful faces of avenging angels left Paris for Rome. Their duty was plain, and neither shirked it. The career of this modern Borgia must be cut short. But their vengeance, righteous though it was, was taken out of their hands.

Upon their arrival, they found all Rome ringing with the suicide of the beautiful Countess Sara d'Escalera. Wetmore and Dean hoped she had found peace through her bitter atonement, believing remorse for her dreadful crimes had urged her to take her own life. But even this poor comfort was denied Dean. Before night her maid had given up to the police a letter she had found stuck in the frame of her lady's looking glass. It was addressed to her husband. In it she avowed her unalterable and absolute devotion to him. She reminded him how she had intrigued to get him money, that he might indulge his passion for gaming. She told him of the fortune she expected from America, and of money coming to her soon "by will." She said that, having discovered he was untrue to her, she no longer cared to live, as he was and had been everything to her, and, reminding him of their courtship, she bade him farewell in touching terms.

All Italians love an amorous tragedy. The body of the beautiful suicide lay in state beneath a velvet pall. Candles burned at her head and feet, Sisters of Charity knelt hour after hour praying by the bier side. In the private chapel the offices for the dead were softly sung.

As Wetmore and Dean stood looking at the beautiful body which had been animated by so evil a soul, the dead woman's husband passed through the room, decorously clad in mourning — a bent, misshapen figure, with furtive eyes and lowering brow, coarse-lipped and sneering.

"In him," said Wetmore, "she found her true mate."

"Yes," said Dean, as they went out into the sunshine.

Dematerialization.*

(A travesty on Stockton's "Amos Kilbright.")

BY C. MASON.

A FAIR young thing, with tender blue eyes, entered Woodworth's office and calmly seated herself. A glance at her portfolio impelled him to seek refuge in the cool brick vault of his neighbor across the passage, Barker, who called himself a banker, but the lady barred the way.

"No," he said desperately, without waiting to be interrogated, "I don't want to subscribe for a History of the War, nor Lives of the Candidates, nor Picturesque Anything."

"But, honored sir," replied the mild, simple and rather simpering young person, "I do not ask you to subscribe for anything, unless, indeed, you would honor me by taking a ticket — "

"Ticket nothing!" again interrupted Woodworth. "I've no leisure for amusements. My time is all taken up with my profession — and science."

"Ah, that is what drew me hither!" beamed the beautiful girl. "I perceived by your sign that you were a lawyer, and I have heard that you are a member — a prominent one — of the Psychical Research Society. In one or both capacities I think you can do me an inestimable service."

Woodworth, touched at two vulnerable points, unbent.

"You see, kind sir," she continued, "that I am a materialized spirit. My manager, Mr. Shockton, who is stopping at the hotel — here is his card — called me forth from the spirit world by mistake for Martha Washington, with whom I was contemporaneous."

Woodworth had noticed the antique style and courtly bearing of his lovely visitor.

"He delayed so long in endeavoring to correct his error," she went on, "that, instead of remaining in the misty, indistinct form

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in which spirits are preferably presented, I became as thoroughly substantial as when I was before on earth, one hundred and thirty years ago."

"Upon my word, young lady — or, venerable dame —" the lawyer corrected with halting courtesy, "this is a very extraordinary statement. Do you know that you render yourself liable to prosecution for obtaining money under false pretences when you attempt to sell tickets on such a tale as that?"

She smiled trustingly. "No, sir, I did not know that. Indeed, I am only beginning to learn the strange things of your wonderful century — but I like them very much. Though my familiarity with the distaff and spindle, the needle and quill pen will no longer afford me a livelihood, I have an ardent longing to learn the sewing machine or the typewriter — and become a New Woman. I am most anxious to resume the life prematurely cut short in 1770, in my eighteenth year, when I died from what was erroneously diagnosed as a quinsy. I have reason to believe that, had I been properly treated for diphtheria with an antitoxin serum, I would have lived to a good old age."

"What is there to prevent you from doing so now?" asked Woodworth, touched and interested immeasurably by his singular client.

"Because my master — for so I must call him — Mr. Shockton, who brought me from the other world, is determined to send me back. I fear that, from mercenary motives, he means to dematerialize me at his very next séance."

Woodworth hurriedly thought of all known legal processes, but neither *habeas corpus*, *ne exeat*, nor any other writ with which he was familiar seemed a remedy against the peculiar form of extradition proposed by Shockton.

Putting on his hat, he exclaimed:

"You sit right there while I interview this tyrant, Miss ——— beg your pardon?"

"Amy Alright was my name before," she answered sweetly.

Finding the spiritual manager in his improvised office at the hotel, the lawyer addressed him by name, saying: "I warn you to desist from your persecution of my client, Miss Amy Alright. She is perfectly satisfied with 'this mundane sphere,' as the re-

porters call it, and intends to remain here. I shall take steps to enjoin you from making her the subject of further experiment."

"Take a ticket," was Shockton's cordial response, thrusting out a card. "One dollar, please; 7.30 this evening. We are going to dematerialize the chit this very night, and if it doesn't come off, call me all the liars you like. Next!"

"One moment, Mr. Shockton," said Woodworth severely. "I understand you to say that you intend to dematerialize, which I suppose means to disembody — to cause to disappear — "

"Into thin air — evaporate — *vamose!*" answered the medium, in a business-like tone.

"Cause to disappear a person now living? That, my dear sir, is murder!"

"Wrong!" replied Shockton. "Who is this girl? where does she hail from? She has been dead one hundred and thirty years. Can't kill a person twice, you know. What good is she, anyhow? She's way behind the times — can't even sell a ticket to her own dematerialization."

"Then you are determined to dematerialize the lady again?" demanded Woodworth, somewhat demoralized.

"Sure; come and see for yourself. Take a ticket, and one for your wife."

"I shall certainly come — with the police. You insist on making this preposterous experiment?"

"Fact. But tell you what I'll do. You may take the young woman — lock her up — do anything you like with her, and I'll bet you a cool hundred I'll dematerialize her all the same."

Woodworth clutched at this proposition — he began to see a way out. The Psychical Research Society was hastily summoned in special session, and Amy Alright was introduced to President Barker and the members. Her frankness and timidity convinced the most sceptical among them that she, at least, was innocent of collusion with the medium. She appeared terribly to dread the threats of Shockton.

"Oh, gentlemen," she pleaded, "put me under ground; put me in some strong place, where it will be impossible to get at me. I am so tired of being a spirit. Don't let me be dematerialized again!"